

Book Club Discussion Guide

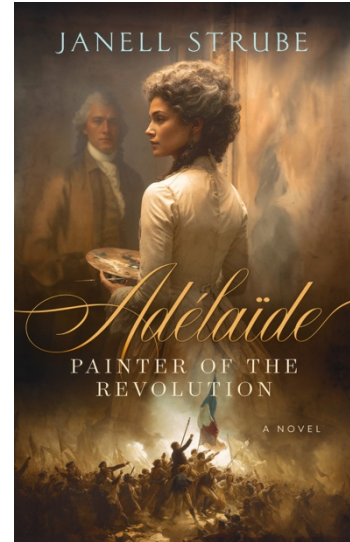
Adélaïde: Painter of the Revolution

by Janell Strube

Historical Context

Set during the tumultuous years of the French Revolution, this novel follows Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, a real-life portraitist who fought for recognition in a male-dominated art world. The story explores:

- **The Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture:** The gatekeeping institution that controlled artistic careers in pre-Revolutionary France.
- **Comte d'Angiviller:** Director of the King's Buildings, who wielded enormous influence over commissions and Academy admissions.
- **Jacques Louis David:** Revolutionary painter and political figure, known for his neoclassical style and role in shaping revolutionary propaganda.
- **Women in the Revolution:** While revolutionary ideals promised liberty and equality, women were ultimately excluded from political and artistic power.



Art and Art History

- The book includes descriptions of many actual works of art. How does this dimension enhance your appreciation of the story? Did it make you want to look up the paintings by Adélaïde and her contemporaries?
 - Almost every character in the book was a historical figure – but not all. Was the balance between historical detail and fictional invention successful? How did you feel about the blending of fact and imagination?
 - What was Adélaïde's lifelong relationship with her art and the creation of art?
-

Artistic Power and Political Influence

- How do the Comte d'Angiviller and Jacques Louis David represent different forms of male power in the art world?
 - What do their relationships with Adélaïde reveal about patronage, politics, and artistic privilege?
 - David is often portrayed as a revolutionary icon. In what ways does his role in the novel complicate or reinforce that image?
 - How does Adélaïde navigate the shifting political landscape to protect her career and ideals?
-

Masculine Roles and Resistance

- Beyond David and d'Angiviller, how do other male characters—such as Adélaïde's father Claude or her romantic interests—support or hinder her ambitions?
 - How does the novel portray the spectrum of male responses to female ambition?
 - Do you think the men in Adélaïde's life are more shaped by personal beliefs or societal pressures?
-

Women, Rivalry, and Solidarity

- Adélaïde's journey is marked by both female mentorship and sabotage. Which female relationships stood out most, and why?
 - How does the novel explore the theme of women undermining other women? What motivates these betrayals—jealousy, survival, societal conditioning?
 - Adélaïde's mother pushes her toward marriage. How does this reflect generational differences in expectations for women?
 - In what ways does Adélaïde challenge the norms of femininity in her time? How do other women respond to her choices?
-

Revolution, Identity, and Legacy

- The French Revolution is a backdrop for Adélaïde's personal revolution. How does political upheaval mirror her internal struggles?
 - What does Adélaïde's fight for artistic recognition say about the intersection of gender and legacy?
 - How does the novel balance historical accuracy with emotional storytelling? Did it change how you view women's roles in revolutionary France?
-

Closing and Reflection

- What was your overall feeling at the end of the book? What is the one scene (or line) from the novel that stayed with you and why?
- How do you feel about Adélaïde's journey?
- If you were to imagine a sequel or companion novel, whose viewpoint would you like to explore – a student of Adélaïde's, a rival, a revolutionary figure, or someone else? What might their story be?